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(54) Abstract Title
Positioning mechanism with flexible members

(57) A mechanism for a multi-axis flexure positioner includes a fixed part and a movable part 7, the movable part 7 being connected to the fixed part via a plurality of transmission means, one for each axis, for transmitting actuation forces for the respective axes to the movable part 7. The transmission means for each axis includes a flexure member 2,3,8 arranged to transmit actuation forced for that axis to the movable part 7 and to flex between the fixed part and the movable part in response to actuation forces associated with the or each other axis. There maybe three flexure members 2,3,8 arranged to extend along three mutually-perpendicular axes so that each flexure member 2,3,8 is flexible along the axes of extent of the other two flexure members 2,3,8. Each of the three flexure members 2,3,8 may comprise a pair of flexure linkages arranged to extend parallel to each other, the three pairs of linkages thus defining three mutually-perpendicular planes.

The mechanism may be used to position optic fibres or waveguides, mirrors, lenses or samples beneath microscopes.

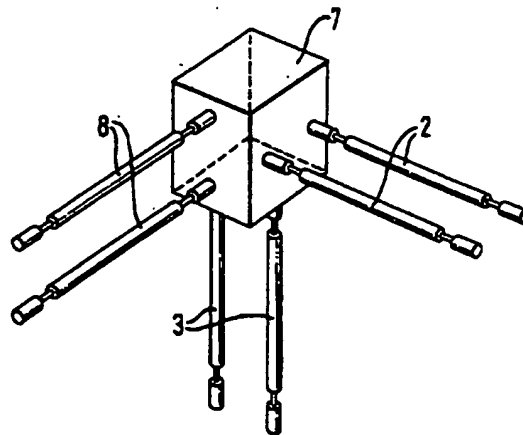


FIG.1

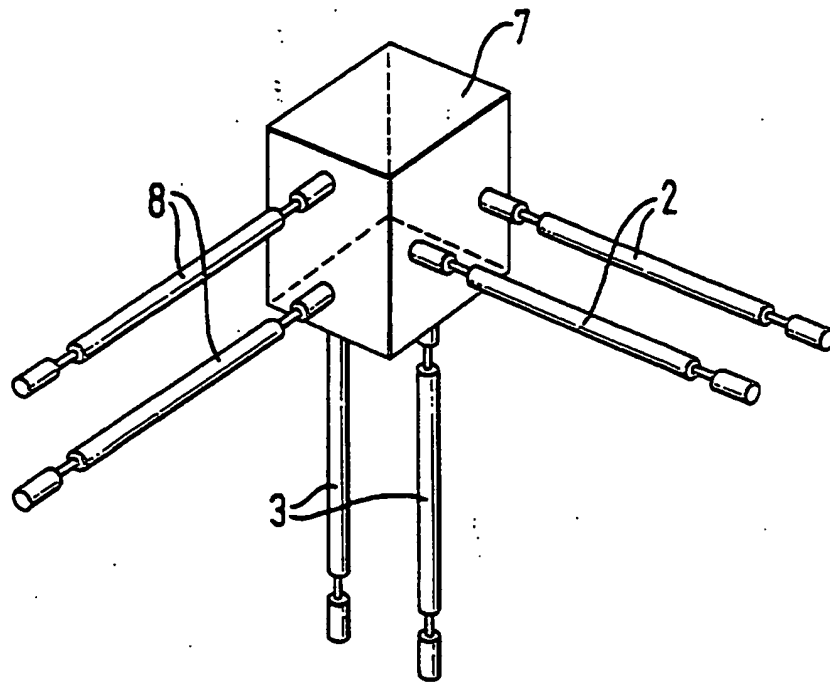


FIG. 1

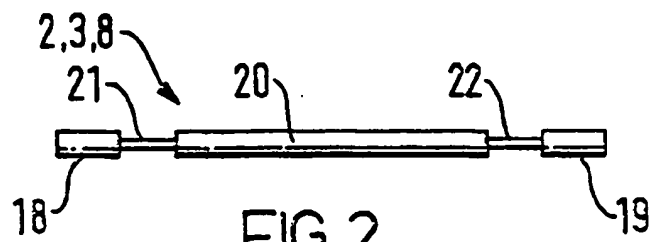


FIG. 2

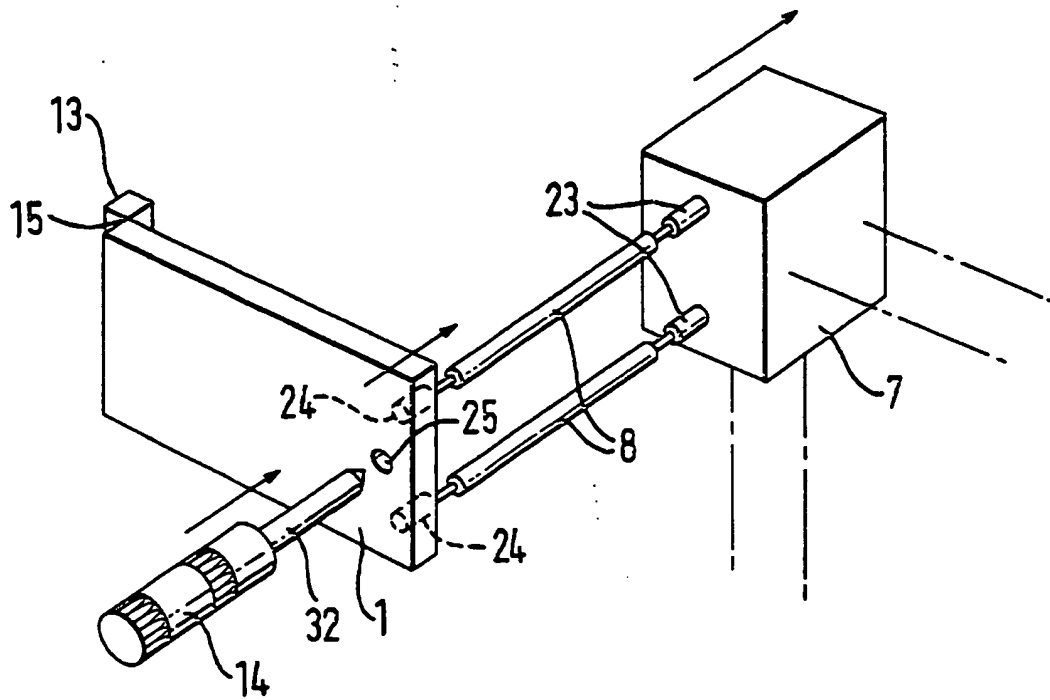
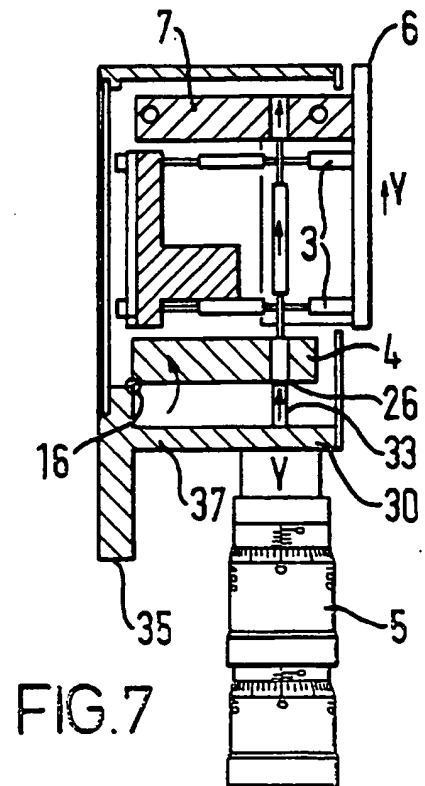
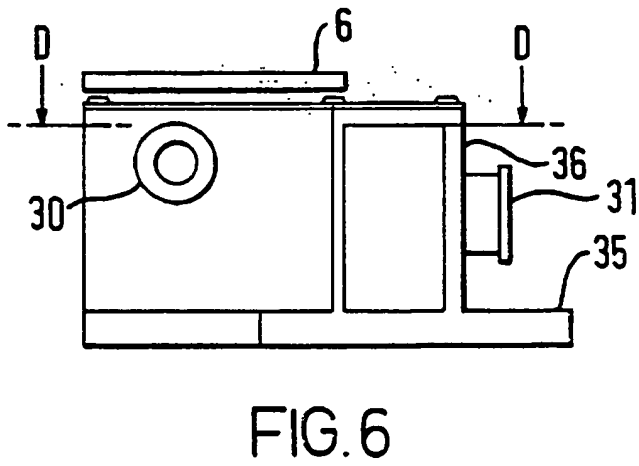
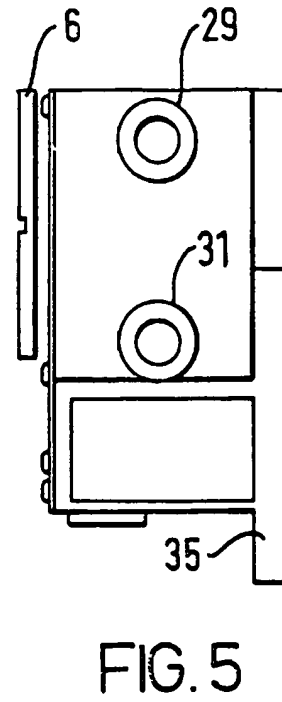
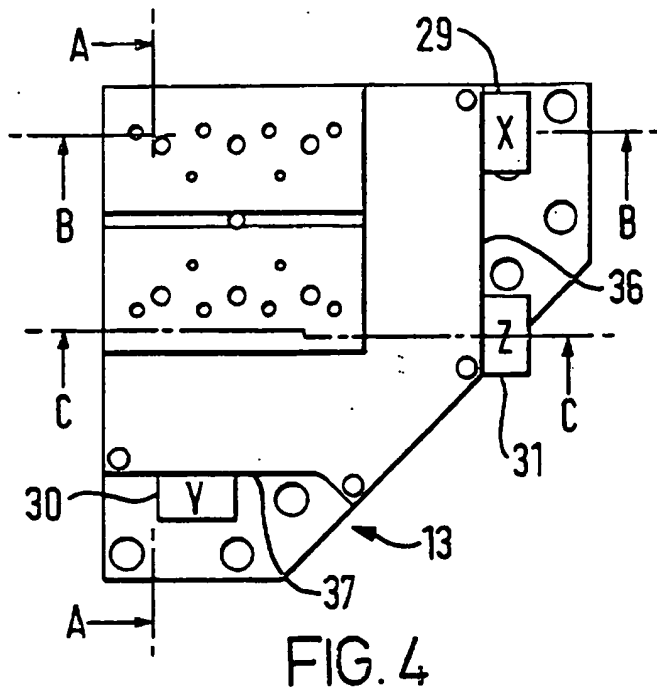
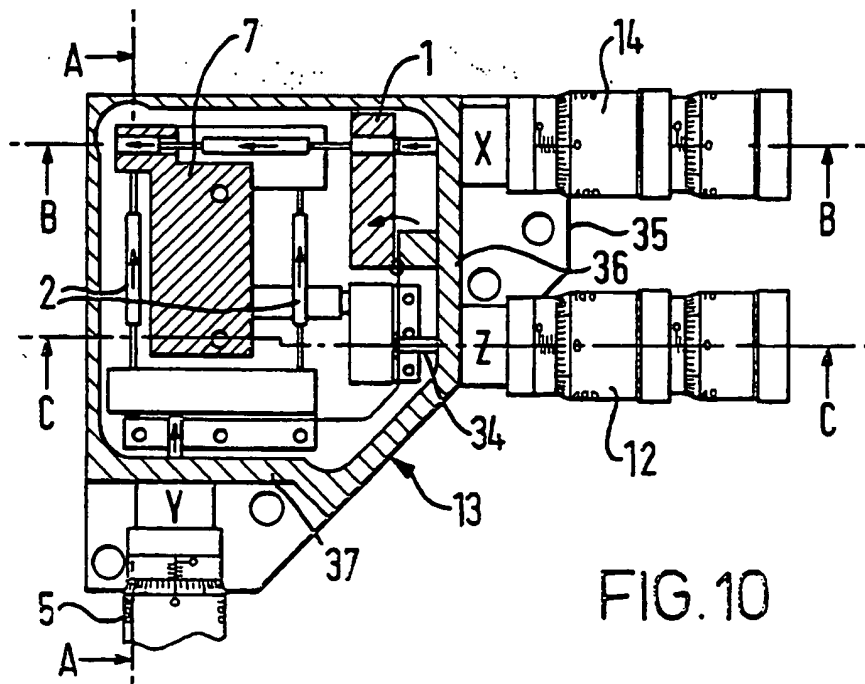
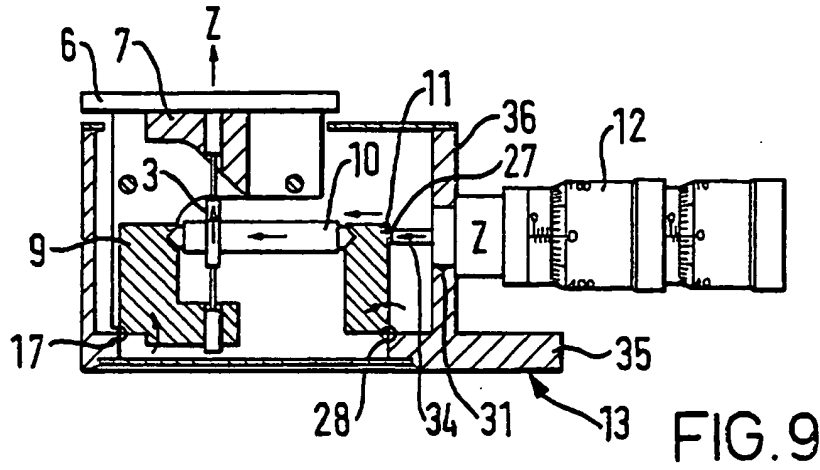
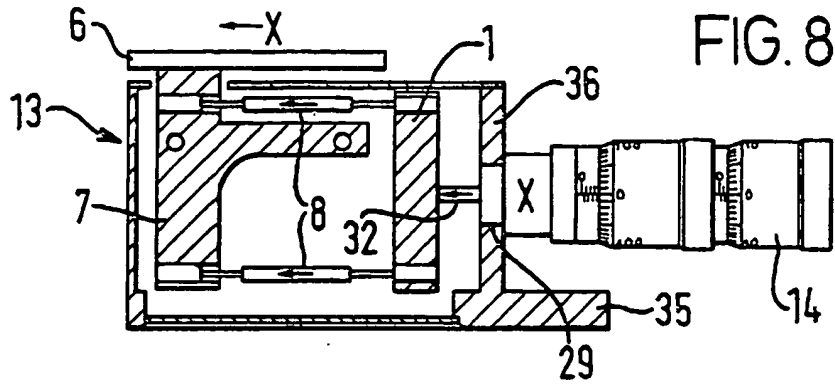


FIG. 3





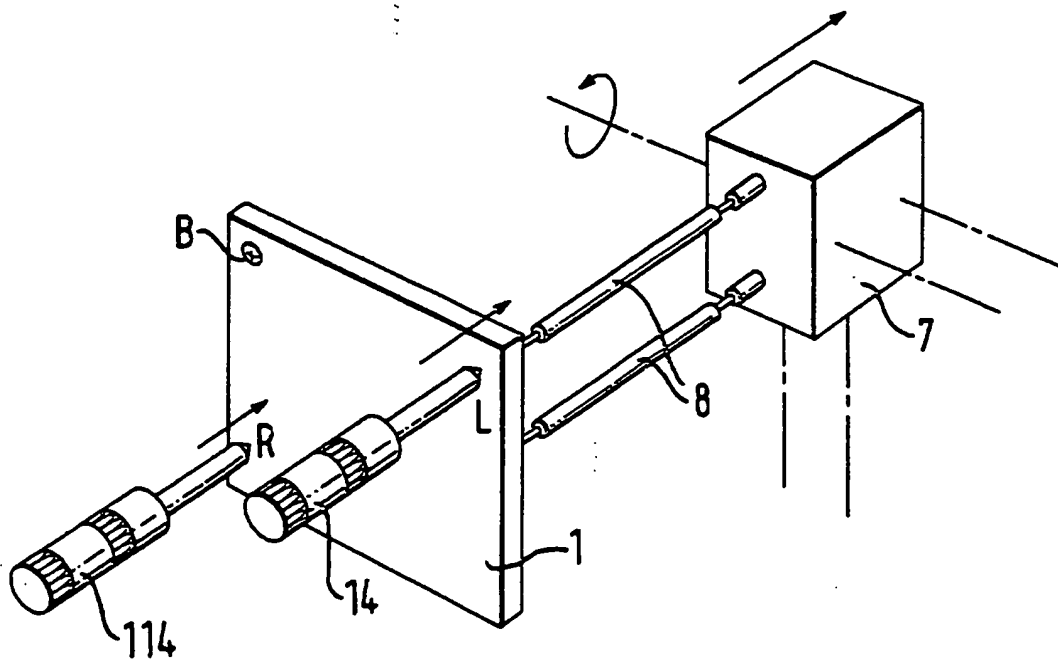


FIG. 11

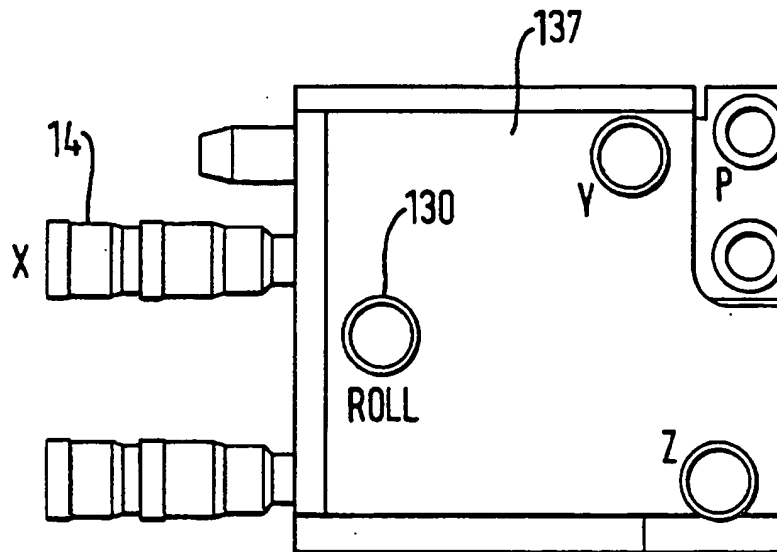
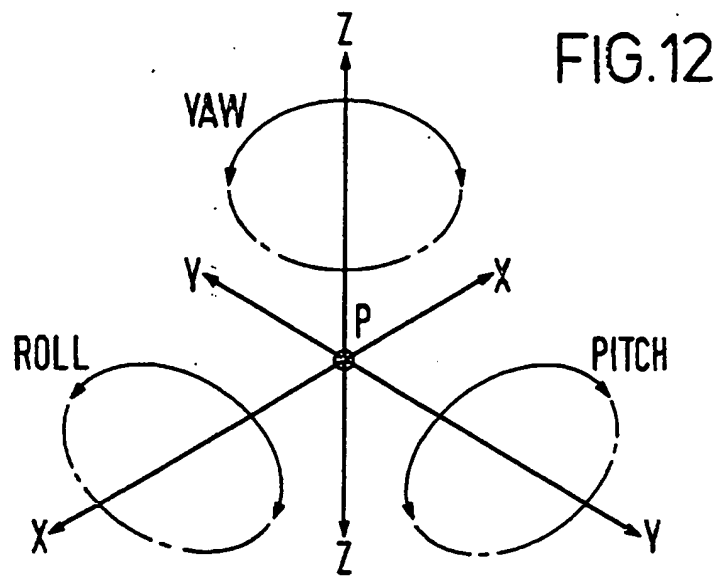


FIG.15

FIG. 13

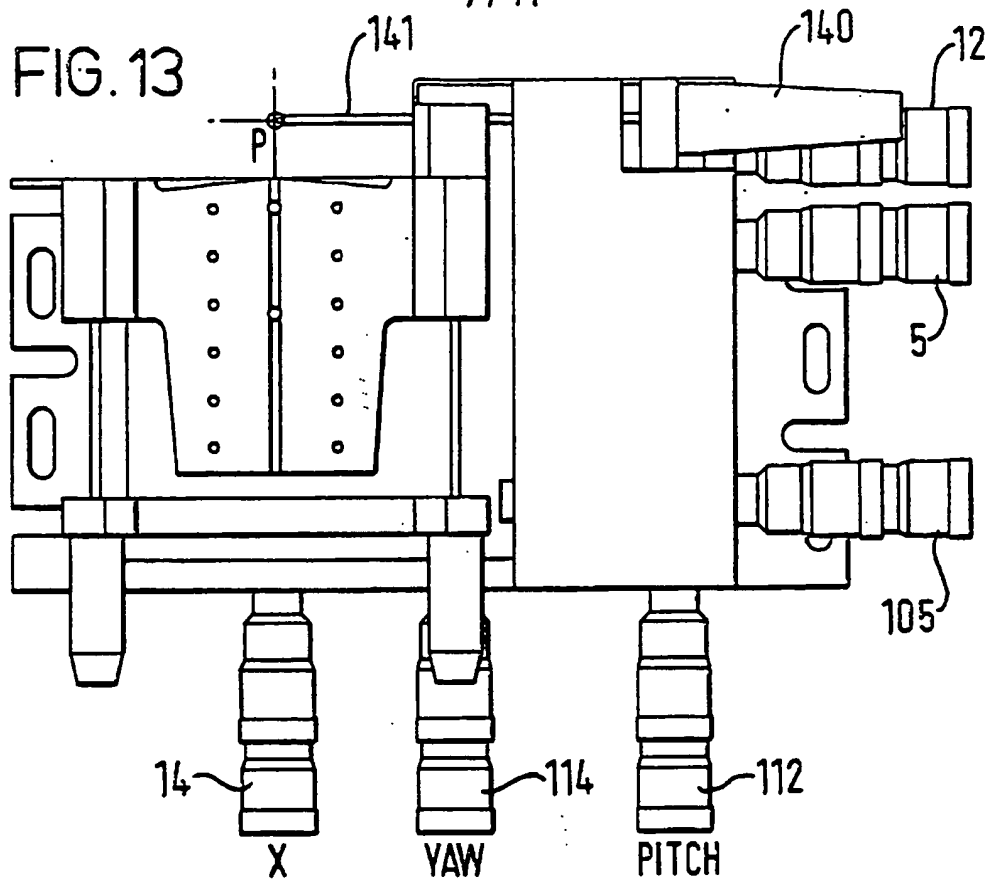
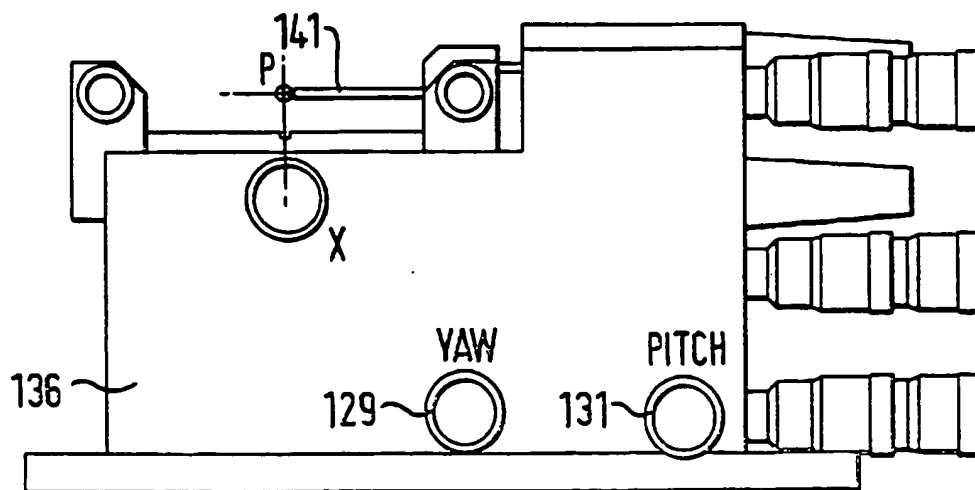


FIG. 14



YAW



-4



PITCH!

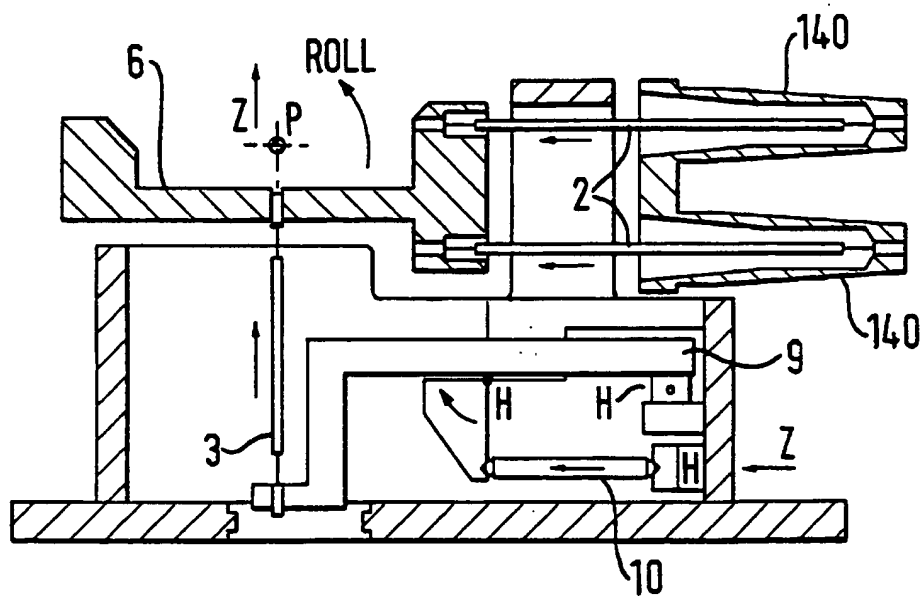


FIG.18

FIG. 19

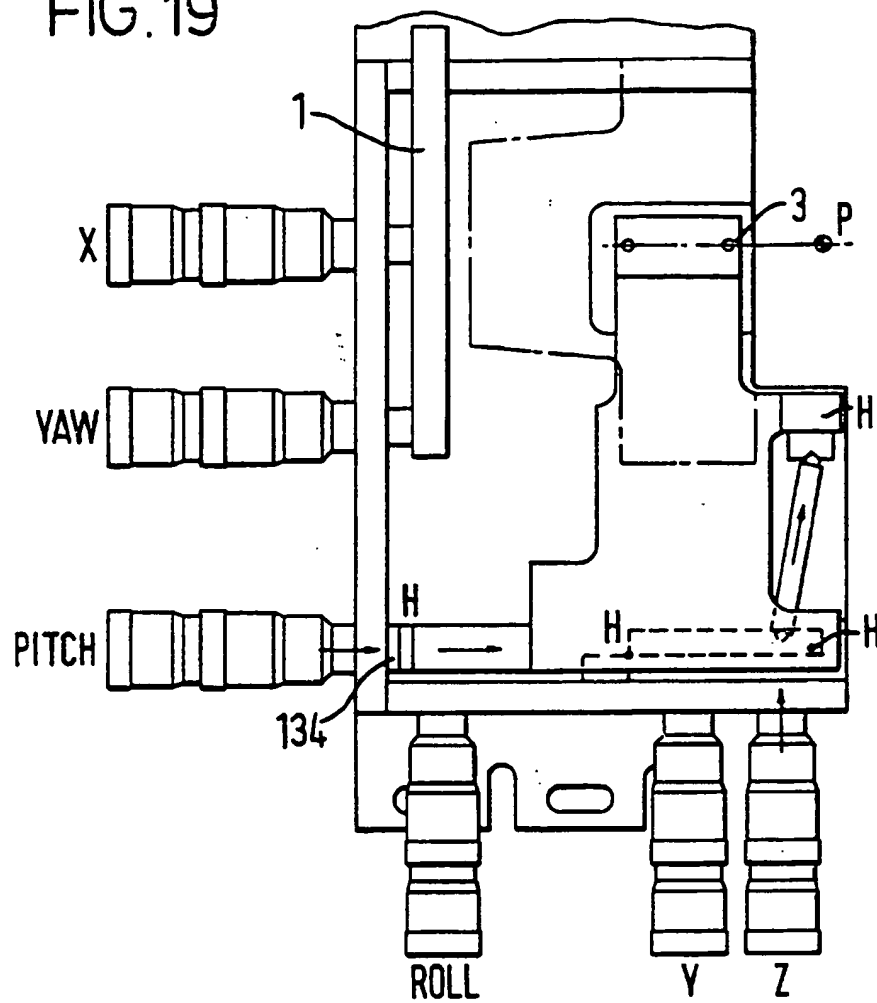
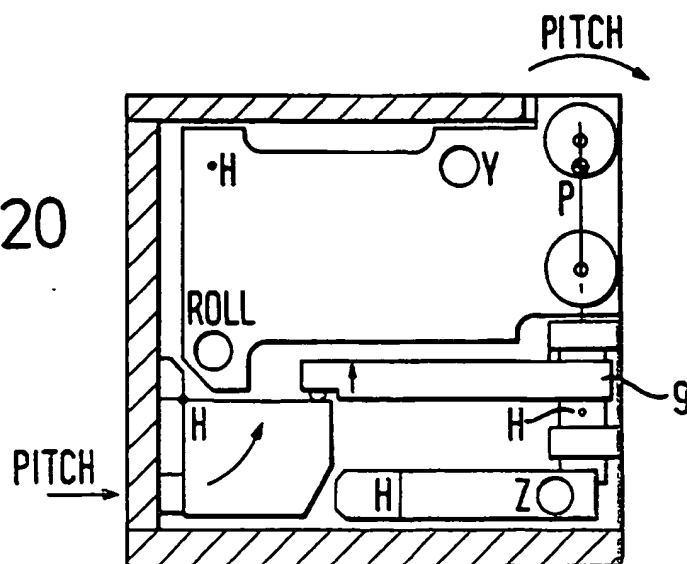


FIG. 20



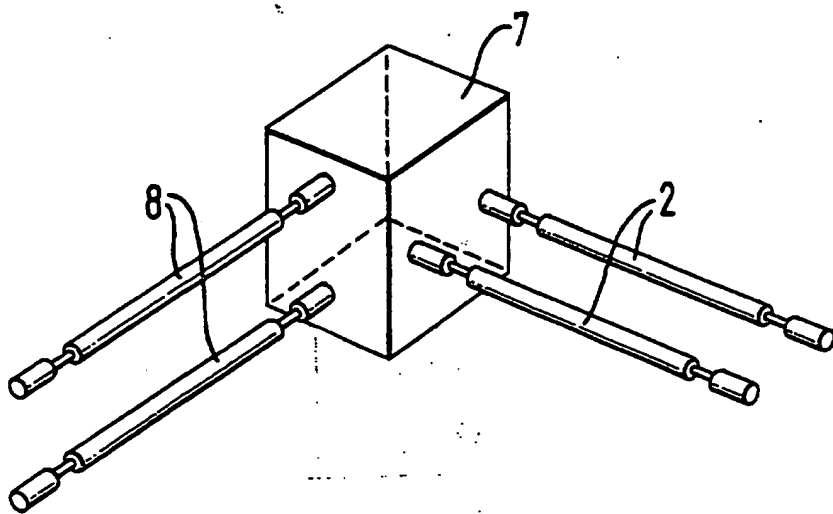


FIG. 21

POSITIONING MECHANISM

This invention relates to a mechanism for a positioner and to a positioner having such a mechanism, more especially to a multi-axis positioning mechanism.

Positioners have many scientific and industrial applications.

One application, for example, is the positioning of optical fibres relative to each other, relative to waveguides, laser diodes, detectors etc, prior to testing and joining. This type of positioning has to be very precise, typically of sub-micron precision, and is commonplace in research and production facilities in the telecommunications industry.

Another application is for positioning optical or non-optical components, such as mirrors, lenses or samples beneath microscopes.

There are two main types of precision positioning stage, those based on bearings and those based on flexure hinges. The simplest form of both types of design produce linear motion, so called x-positioners. Both types of design can however be adapted to produce rotary motion with additional linkages and the like, so called θ -positioners.

Many applications require not one, but several, axes of motion. This is obtained by stacking several stages. For example, bolting the top plate of one bearing stage to the base of another linear stage so that the respective positioning axes are at right angles to each other will produce a two-axis positioner, or so-called xy-positioner. Moreover, by then bolting an L-bracket onto the top-plate of the y-stage and a further bearing stage onto the upright of the L-bracket, a three-axis positioner, or so-called xyz-positioner, is produced.

Sometimes multi-axis positioners are supplied as

integrated units. For example, in an xy-positioner, the top plate of the x-stage can also serve as the base plate of the y-stage, to reduce size and weight.

5 Flexure stages can also be nested in various ways to make them more compact.

However, the integration of parts in this way does not affect the basic principle of operation which is to use a number of similar mechanisms connected serially.

10 There are however several drawbacks to the use of a series of single axis mechanisms for multi-axis positioners:

1. The complexity and cost tends to increase with the number of axes.

15 2. The mass of moving parts increases with the number of axes, making the positioner slower to respond and more susceptible to ambient vibrations.

20 3. The force of adjusting a micrometer (other than that of the first stage) is transmitted through the preceding stages, causing disturbance to the position of the stages.

4. The stiffness of the positioner decreases as the number of axes increases.

25 According to the invention there is provided a multi-axis positioning mechanism comprising a fixed part and a movable part, the fixed part and the movable part being interconnected by at least two flexure members arranged to extend along respective mutually perpendicular axes, the members being rigidly secured at one of their ends to the movable part and
30 displaceably mounted at the other of their ends to the fixed part via respective transmission means so as to allow the members to be displaced along their respective axes of extent, each flexure member being rigid along its axis of extent and flexible along the
35 or each axis of extent of the or each other flexure member.

Preferred embodiments of the invention incorporate up to six axes of motion into a positioning mechanism of this kind. Once fitted with actuators, such as micrometers, the positioning mechanism forms a multi-axis positioner, preferably a micropositioner, with a corresponding number of axes of motion.

In the preferred embodiments, the movable block of the positioner is supported by six linkages, each linkage being thinned towards each end to give the linkage flexibility to bend in two directions and to twist about its axis of extent.

The new design allows multi-axis positioners to be made which have one or more of the following advantages:

1. Low mass of moving parts - better response time, more resistance to ambient vibrations.
2. Adjusting a micrometer, or other actuator, for one axis does not result in force being transmitted through the mechanics of the stage and disturbing the positions set by the or each other stage.
3. Greater stiffness resulting from the parallel rather than serial action of the linkages.
4. Because there are fewer parts in series, lost motion among adjacent parts is minimized and the overall precision is improved.
5. Simpler design, lower cost.

These advantages become more significant as the number of axes increases.

A sub-micron positioning precision is achievable.

Further aspects of the invention are exemplified by the attached claims.

For a better understanding of the invention, and to show how the same may be carried into effect, reference will now be made, by way of example, to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Fig. 1 is to illustrate the principles of operation of the positioning mechanisms of first and second embodiments of the invention and shows schematically a movable block and three pairs of linkages;

Fig. 2 shows a linkage used in the first and second embodiments of the invention;

Fig. 3 is to illustrate the principles of operation of the positioning mechanism of the first embodiment of the invention, which is an xyz-positioning mechanism, and shows schematically a movable block, one pair of linkages, a hinged plate and an actuator;

Figs. 4 to 6 are scale technical drawings of the positioning mechanism of the first embodiment, being arranged on a single sheet of the drawings in third angle projection, Fig. 4 being a plan view, i.e. along the z-axis, Fig. 5 a side view along the x-axis and Fig. 6 a side view along the y-axis;

Figs. 7, 8 and 9 are scale technical drawings respectively through sections 'AA', 'BB' and 'CC' of Fig. 4, also showing actuators fitted to the positioning mechanism;

Fig. 10 is a scale technical drawing through section 'DD' of Fig. 6, also showing actuators fitted to the positioning mechanism;

Fig. 11 is to illustrate the principles of operation of the positioning mechanism of the second embodiment of the invention and shows schematically a movable block, one pair of linkages, a pivot plate and two actuators, one for linear motion and one for rotary motion;

Fig. 12 defines, for the second embodiment, the geometrical relationship between the three linear degrees of freedom, namely X, Y & Z, the three rotary degrees of freedom, namely ROLL, PITCH & YAW, and the

common pivot point, P, of the rotary degrees of freedom;

5 Figs. 13 to 15 are scale technical drawings of the positioning mechanism of the second embodiment, with actuators fitted, Fig. 13 being a plan view, i.e. along the z-axis, Fig. 14 a side view along the x-axis and Fig. 15 a side view along the y-axis;

10 Fig. 16 is a plan view corresponding to Fig. 13, but in partial section to show parts of the positioning mechanism relating to the X & YAW and Y & ROLL axes;

Fig. 17 is a side view corresponding to Fig. 14, but in partial section to show parts of the positioning mechanism relating to the X & YAW and Y & ROLL axes;

15 Fig. 18 is a side view corresponding to Fig. 14, but in partial section to show parts of the positioning mechanism relating to the Y & ROLL axes and Z & PITCH axes;

20 Fig. 19 is a plan view corresponding to Fig. 13, but in partial section to show parts of the positioning mechanism relating to the Z & PITCH axes;

Fig. 20 is a side view corresponding to Fig. 15, but in partial section to show parts of the positioning mechanism relating to the Y & ROLL axes and Z & PITCH axes; and

25 Fig. 21 is to illustrate the principles of operation of the positioning mechanism of a third embodiment of the invention and shows schematically a movable block and two pairs of linkages.

30 Fig. 1 is to illustrate the principles of operation of the positioning mechanisms of embodiments of the invention.

35 A movable block 7 is shown supported in space by three pairs of linkages 8, 2 and 3 via which the block 7 is moved in use. The three pairs of linkages are arranged to extend along mutually orthogonal axes x, y and z respectively. Moreover the ones of each pair of

linkages extend parallel to each other, so that each pair of linkages lies in a plane, this plane being perpendicular to the equivalent two planes in which the other two pairs of linkages lie. Before describing how the block 7 is moved in use, the design of the linkages is first described in more detail.

Each linkage needs to be rigid in respect of forces applied along an axis of extent of the linkage, referred to as lengthways in the following, but deformable in respect of forces applied across that axis of extent, referred to as sideways in the following. Consequently, a force applied to one end portion of the linkage substantially lengthways will be transmitted to the other end portion of the linkage, whereas a force applied to one end portion of the linkage sideways will not be transmitted to the other end of the linkage, but rather accommodated by lateral deformation of the linkage. That is, the linkage has a relatively high stiffness along its extent combined with a relatively low shear stiffness in respect of shear across its extent in at least one, but preferably all, lateral directions. It is also preferable that the torsional stiffness be relatively low in embodiments, such as the second embodiment, where rotary motions are possible.

The linkage shown in Fig. 2 is the design chosen to provide the desired lengthways rigidity and lateral and torsional deformability in the embodiments of the invention. The linkage comprises two end portions 18 and 19 disposed on either side of a central portion 20, the central and end portions being interconnected by two flexible portions 21 and 22. The central and end portions 18 to 20 are made of sections of stainless steel rod of 3mm diameter. The central portion is around 25mm in length and the end portions 10mm. The flexible portions 21 and 22 are made of sections of

music wire of 1mm diameter and are each around 15mm in free length with around 10mm at each end received in bores in the central and end portions and cemented in place by adhesive bonding, thus to leave a free length of the wire sections of around 10mm.

Music wire is chosen since it allows a large degree of elastic bending and torsion without reaching the plastic limit. Other spring steel elements, or other suitable elements with similar properties, could also be used.

Returning to Fig. 1, the linkages 2, 3 and 8 are arranged with their end portions 19 located in the movable block 7 and their end portions 18 arranged to receive respective actuation forces from respective actuators (not shown in Fig. 1), for example micrometers.

Thus, if, for example, both of the linkages 8 are displaced together equal distances, the block 7 will be translated in a horizontal direction. During the horizontal translation, the ends of the other linkages 2 and 3 remote from the block 7 are held fixed so that these linkages are subject to shear strain, as viewed along their respective axes of extent, which is accommodated by flexure of the flexible portions of the linkages.

As will now be appreciated, the above-described geometric arrangement in which the three pairs of linkages extend along mutually orthogonal axes x, y and z respectively, can only be precisely fulfilled for one position of the movable block 7, this one position being referred to in the following as the nominal position. Moreover, in the following, a general position of the block will be referred to as the set position.

The set position can thus be varied in use by adjusting the position of the end portions 18 of the

linkages arranged remote from the block. For a given pair of linkages, movement of the end portions 18 through equal distances will produce translation of the movable block 7, as in the above-described example, and
5 movement of the end portions 18 through different amounts will produce rotation of the block 7.

Six linkages provide the exact desired number of constraints to hold the block 7 rigidly in a set position, six is thus the preferred number of
10 linkages. If there are fewer than six linkages, the block will not in general be held rigidly. If there are more than six linkages, some of the linkages provide redundant constraints and as a result residual forces exist within the system.

15 It is noted that in Fig. 1 the movable block 7 is illustrated as having the shape of a cube. This shape is chosen purely for ease of explanation. In reality, a cubic shape will not generally be the optimum shape, as will be appreciated further below. The movable
20 block 7 may be a rigid body of any convenient shape.

In the following embodiments, the end portions 18 are attached to plates (not shown in Fig. 1) the mounting of which depends on the axes of motion required.

25 Fig. 3 shows, highly schematically, the plate mounting arrangement adopted in the first embodiment of the invention, this arrangement being suitable for providing a linear movement of the block 7, by causing the ones of a pair of the linkages 8 to move together
30 equal distances.

In addition to the components shown in Fig. 1, Fig. 3 shows a plate 1 which is hingedly mounted relative to a case 13 via a hinge 15. The plate 1 need not literally have the form of a plate, but may be a
35 rigid body of arbitrary shape arranged to rotate about a single axis in the manner of a hinge. The hinge axis

is arranged to lie along a line parallel to a line drawn between the points where the linkages 8 meet the plate 1. On the side of the plate facing towards the movable block 7, the end portions 18 of the linkages 8 are located by locating means 24. (The end portions 19 of the linkages are located by locating means 23 of the block 7). On the other side of the plate, i.e. the side facing away from the movable block 7, there is a contact region 25 at which a micrometer 14 acts via the end of its spindle 32. The micrometer is mounted on the case 13 by micrometer mounting means (not shown in Fig. 3). Although a micrometer is shown, the actuator may be of any type, for example motorised fine thread or piezoelectric.

A tension spring (not shown) holds the region 25 of the plate 1 in contact with the end of the micrometer spindle 32. The tension spring is connected at one end to the block 7 and extends through a through hole in the plate 1, being connected at its other end to a part of the case 13 located behind the plate 1.

In use, the micrometer 14 moves the plate 1, in turn moving the pair of linkages 8, causing the block 7 to move in an approximately straight line parallel to the linkages 8. The movement does in fact have small arcuate components as a result of the geometrical constraints imposed by the other pairs of linkages 2 and 3, which must bend to accommodate movement of the linkages 8. This effect is analogous to the motion of a conventional one-axis flexure stage.

When three hinge plate mechanisms of the kind shown in Fig. 3 are used, a three-axis positioner can be provided, allowing movement of the block 7 in three linear directions X, Y, & Z.

In the arrangement shown in Fig. 3, motion is transmitted directly from the micrometer to the plate. It is however in some instances preferable for motion

to be transmitted to the plate from the micrometer indirectly, such as by means of an intermediate crank or linkage. An example of an indirect drive of this kind is described further below for the z-transmission of the first and second embodiments. By contrast, the x- and y-transmissions in these embodiments are direct.

A practical example of a three-axis positioner according to the first embodiment is shown in Figs. 4 to 10 and will now be described. For ease of manufacture, the movable part of the positioner is made of two parts which are bolted together, namely block 7 and platform 6 which serves as a top plate on which the optical fibre, lens or whatever can conveniently be mounted. Because these parts are bolted together, they behave as one rigid body. The six flexible linkages are arranged in three pairs, namely flexible x-linkages 8, flexible y-linkages 2 and flexible z-linkages 3. It can be seen that the three pairs lie in mutually perpendicular planes. One end of each linkage is attached to the block 7. The other ends of the respective pairs of linkages are attached to respective ones of the hinged plates, namely hinged x-plate 1, hinged y-plate 4 and hinged z-plate 9.

If the x-micrometer 14 is displaced, the x-plate 1 moves about its hinge. The ends of the flexible x-linkages 8 attached to the plate 1 move through equal distances in the same direction as the micrometer axis, causing the movable part of the positioner 6 and 7 to move in the same direction also. The flexibility of the y- and z-linkages 2 & 3 allows this movement to occur over a range of travel which is a relatively small proportion of the linkage lengths. The travel in this example is limited to 4 mm on each axis. This relatively small range of travel is a common feature of all flexure stages.

The operation of the Y axis is similar to that of

the X axis.

5 The operation of the Z (vertical) axis differs in
that the motion is effectively cranked round by 90
degrees, so that the z-micrometer 12 can be mounted
horizontally and not vertically. Additional parts,
namely a hinged driver plate 11, on which bears the
spindle 34 of the horizontally mounted z-micrometer 12,
and a horizontally extending ball-ended linkage 10,
interconnecting the driver plate 11 and the z-plate 9,
10 are used to transmit the z-motion. The z-micrometer 12
can thus be positioned conveniently in terms of the
detailed design. Alternatively, the z-micrometer could
act directly on the hinged z-plate 9, similar to the X-
and Y-micrometers, but in general this will be less
15 convenient if the positioner is to be table mounted.

 Fig. 11 shows, highly schematically, the plate
mounting arrangement adopted in the second embodiment
of the invention, this arrangement being suitable for
providing linear and rotary movement of the block 7.
20 This is achieved by providing an arrangement in which
two actuators 14 and 114, shown as micrometers, act on
a pivotally mounted plate 1. The plate 1 is pivoted
about a point B. The first micrometer 14 serves to
impart a linear motion to the movable block 7. It acts
25 at a point L such that a line LB, defined by points L
and B, is perpendicular to the plane in which the two
linkages 8 lie. The second micrometer 114 serves to
impart a rotary motion to the movable block 7. It acts
at a point R such that a line RB, defined by the points
30 R and B, is parallel to the plane in which the two
linkages 8 lie. Thus, when the micrometer 14 is
actuated, the plate 1 hinges about the line RB, similar
to the first embodiment, and causes both of the
linkages 8 of the pair to move together, resulting in
35 linear movement of the block 7. Moreover, when the
micrometer 114 is actuated, the plate 1 hinges about

the line LB and causes relative movement between the two linkages 8 of the pair, resulting in rotary movement of the block 7.

5 A compression spring (not shown) holds the plate 1 in contact with the ends of the spindles of the micrometers 14 and 114. A bolt (not shown) is bolted into a part of the case 13 with the shank of the bolt passing through a through hole in the plate 1. The compression spring is helical and arranged over the
10 shank of the bolt bearing at one end on the plate 1 in a region surrounding the rim of the through hole and at the other end on the head of the bolt, preferably via a washer.

When three pivot plate mechanisms of the kind
15 shown in Fig. 11 are used, a six-axis positioner can be provided, allowing movement of the block 7 in three linear directions X, Y, & Z and three rotary directions, YAW, ROLL & PITCH. Moreover, by correct dimensioning of the linkages it is possible to arrange
20 for the three rotary motions of the movable block 7, associated with the three respective plates, to occur around axes that intersect at a common point P, as is the case in the concrete example of the second embodiment described further below.

25 If only rotary movement is required, but no linear movement, the pivot plate can be substituted with a hinged plate hinged about the line LB and the actuator 14 dispensed with.

A practical example of a six-axis positioner
30 according to the second embodiment is shown in Figs. 13 to 20 and will now be described, also with reference to Fig. 12.

As in the three axis positioner, the movable part of the positioner is made of two parts 6 and 7 for ease
35 of manufacture.

There are three pairs of flexible linkages 8, 2 &

3, joined to the movable block 7 and their respective pivot plates 1, 4 and 9. The attachment points of the linkages to the plates are extended by tapered tubes beyond the plane of the plates themselves. This is
5 done so that the rotations occur about a common point P in space. This is often desirable.

The moving plates are mounted pivotally at a point B allowing pivoting in two directions. There are two micrometers acting on the movable x-plate. One
10 micrometer 14, for x-actuation, tilts the plate about an axis parallel to the plane of the linkages. This moves the linkages through the same distance, causing the block 7 and platform 6 to translate. The other
15 micrometer 114, for yaw-actuation, tilts the plate about an axis perpendicular to the plane of the linkages. This moves the linkages through different distances, in this example equal but opposite distances, causing the block 7 and platform 6 to rotate about the point P.

20 Operation of the movable Y-plate 4 is similar to the movable X-plate.

The movable Z-plate 9 differs in that motion is transmitted to it via additional parts, namely two lever blocks, a ball-ended linkage and a lever plate.
25 The result is essentially the same as if the micrometers acted directly on the plate, however the additional parts allow the micrometers to be mounted horizontally in convenient positions.

30 Fig. 21 is to illustrate the principles of operation of the positioning mechanism of a third embodiment of the invention which is for a two-axis positioner.

Fig. 21 shows a movable block 7 connected to two pairs of linkages 8 and 2. The individual linkages
35 having the same design as those of the first and second embodiments. The two pairs of linkages extend out of

the block 7 at right angles to each other so that each of the pairs linkages have a collective flexure direction parallel to the axis of extent of the other of the linkages. However, the pair of linkages 2 are
5 arranged to lie in a plane perpendicular to that of the equivalent plane of the first and second embodiments (see Fig. 1) so that positioning movement of the block 7 through one of the pairs of linkages 8 and 2 is accommodated principally by bending flexure, rather
10 than by shear or torsional flexure, of the other of the pairs of linkages 2 and 8 respectively.

In use, actuation of one of the linkages along its axis of extent is thus accommodated by flexure of the other of the linkages as the block 7 is moved. An xy-
15 or xz-positioner may thus be realised. The block 7 may be suspended along a third axis mutually perpendicular to the axes of extent of the linkages 8 and 2. Alternatively, the block 7 may be supported relative to this third axis by some low friction bed, such as a bed
20 of ball bearings. The detail design of a positioner according to the third embodiment may generally follow that of the first embodiment, for example using hinged plate actuation mechanisms as shown in Fig. 3.

Reference Numerals

FIRST (SECOND) EMBODIMENT

all 100+ numerals are for second embodiment

5	
	1 hinged (pivoted) x-plate
	2 flexible y-linkages (y/roll linkages), 2 of
	3 flexible z-linkages (z/pitch linkages), 2 of
	4 hinged (pivoted) y-plate
10	5 y-actuator
	105 roll-actuator
	6 platform [top plate]
	7 movable block
	8 flexible x-linkages (x/yaw linkages), 2 of
15	9 hinged (pivoted) z-plate
	10 ball-ended driver plate linkage for z
	11 hinged driver plate for z
	12 z-actuator
	112 pitch-actuator
20	13 case
	14 x-actuator
	114 yaw-actuator
	15 x-hinge
	16 y-hinge
25	17 z-hinge
	18 linkage actuator-end rigid locating portion
	19 linkage carriage-end rigid locating portion
	20 linkage central rigid portion
	21 linkage actuator-end flexible portion
30	22 linkage carriage-end flexible portion
	23 carriage linkage-locating means, in pairs
	24 hinged-plate linkage-locating means, in pairs
	25 hinged x-plate actuator-spindle contact region
	26 hinged y-plate actuator-spindle contact region
35	27 hinged z-plate actuator-spindle contact region
	28 driver plate hinge

29 x-actuator mounting means (part of case 13)
129 yaw-actuator mounting means (part of case 13)
30 y-actuator mounting means (part of case 13)
130 roll-actuator mounting means (part of case 13)
5 31 z-actuator mounting means (part of case 13)
131 pitch-actuator mounting means (part of case 13)
32 x-actuator drive spindle
132 yaw-actuator drive spindle
33 y-actuator drive spindle
10 133 roll-actuator drive spindle
34 z-actuator drive spindle
134 pitch-actuator drive spindle
35 base plate of case
36 side plate of case 13 accommodating
15 x- and z-actuator mounting means
136 side plate of case 13 accommodating
x- pitch- and yaw-actuator mounting means
37 side plate of case 13 accommodating
y-actuator mounting means
20 137 side plate of case 13 accommodating
roll- y- and z-actuator mounting means
140 tapered tube mount elongations
141 pivot point indicator probe

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Claims:

1. A multi-axis positioning mechanism comprising a fixed part and a movable part, the fixed part and the movable part being interconnected by at least two
5 flexure members arranged to extend along respective mutually perpendicular axes, the members being rigidly secured at one of their ends to the movable part and displaceably mounted at the other of their ends to the fixed part via respective transmission means so as to
10 allow the members to be displaced along their respective axes of extent, each flexure member being rigid along its axis of extent and flexible along the or each axis of extent of the or each other flexure member.
- 15 2. A mechanism for a multi-axis flexure positioner, the mechanism including a fixed part and a movable part, the movable part being connected to the fixed part via a plurality of transmission means, one for each axis, for transmitting actuation forces for
20 the respective axes to the movable part, wherein the transmission means for each axis includes a flexure member arranged to transmit actuation forces for that axis to the movable part and to flex between the fixed part and the movable part in response to actuation
25 forces associated with the or each other axis.
3. A mechanism according to claim 1 or 2, wherein there are two of said at least two flexure members, the two flexure members being arranged to extend along two mutually perpendicular axes, each of
30 the two flexure members being flexible along the axis of extent of the other flexure member, but inflexible along a third axis perpendicular to said two mutually perpendicular axes.
4. A mechanism according to claim 1 or 2,
35 wherein there are three of said at least two flexure members arranged to extend along three mutually

perpendicular axes so that each flexure member is flexible along the axes of extent of the other two flexure members.

5 5. A mechanism according to claim 4, wherein each of the three flexure members comprises a pair of flexure linkages arranged to extend parallel to each other, the three pairs of linkages thus defining three planes, the linkages being so arranged that said three planes are mutually perpendicular.

10 6. A mechanism according to claim 5, wherein each linkage comprises at least two flexible portions spaced apart along the length of the linkage.

15 7. A mechanism according to claim 6, wherein each linkage comprises a rigid portion interconnecting two of said at least two flexible portions.

8. A mechanism according to claim 7, wherein there are two of said at least two flexible portions.

20 9. A mechanism according to claim 6, 7 or 8, wherein each linkage comprises two rigid end portions, each pair of linkages being displaceably mounted to the fixed part via its associated transmission means.

25 10. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least one of the transmission means comprises a plate attached to the fixed part via hinge means.

30 11. A mechanism according to claim 10 when appended to claim 5, wherein the hinge means defines a hinge axis aligned parallel to, and offset from, the plane defined by the associated pair of linkages, and perpendicular to the axis of extent of the associated pair of linkages, to allow linear movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part.

35 12. A mechanism according to claim 10 when appended to claim 5, wherein the hinge means defines a hinge axis aligned perpendicular to the plane defined by the associated pair of linkages to allow rotary

movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part.

13. A mechanism according to claim 10, 11 or 12 in combination with one actuator for each hinged plate, the or each actuator being arranged to actuate the plate and thus control movement of the flexure linkages associated with the hinged plate.

14. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least one of the transmission means comprises a plate attached to the fixed part via pivot means.

15. A mechanism according to claim 14 when appended to claim 5, wherein the pivot means allows the plate to rotate about two mutually perpendicular axes of rotation, a first one of said axes of rotation being parallel to, and offset from, the plane defined by the associated pair of linkages, and perpendicular to the axis of extent of the associated pair of linkages, and the second of said axes of rotation being perpendicular to the first rotational axis and the axis of extent of the associated pair of linkages, to allow both linear and rotary movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part.

16. A mechanism according to claim 14 or 15 in combination with a pair of actuators for each pivot plate, the or each pair of actuators being arranged to actuate the plate and thus control movement of the flexure linkages associated with the pivot plate so that one of each pair of actuators serves to provide linear movement, and the other of each pair of actuators rotary movement, of the movable part relative to the fixed part.

17. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least two of the transmission means provide for rotary movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part about

respective axes of rotary movement, the mechanism being dimensioned and arranged so that the axes of rotary movement are mutually perpendicular.

5 18. A mechanism according to claim 17, the mechanism being dimensioned and arranged so that the at least two axes of rotary movement intersect at a common point.

10 19. A mechanism according to claim 18, wherein the linkages of one of the pairs of linkages are of a different length to the linkages of the other, or another, of the pairs of linkages, the linkages of each pair of linkages being of equal length.

15 20. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least two of the transmission means provide for linear movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part about respective axes of linear motion, the mechanism being dimensioned and arranged so that the axes of linear motion are mutually perpendicular.

20 21. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least one of the transmission means provides for linear movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part about an axis of linear motion and wherein at least one of the transmission means provides for rotary movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part about an axis of rotary motion, the mechanism being dimensioned and arranged so that the axes of linear and rotary motion are one and the same axis.

25 21. A positioner comprising a base and a platform, the platform being connected to the base via a plurality of drive means for moving the platform along a respective plurality of axes, each drive means including a body part, which does not move along the axis associated with that drive means during movement of the platform, and a drive part extensible from the

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body part to cause movement along the axis concerned.

22. A mechanism for a positioner comprising a base and a carriage, the carriage being movable with a plurality of degrees of freedom with respect to the
5 base via flexible members, one for each of said degrees of freedom, wherein the carriage is supported in space relative to the base by the flexible members.

23. A mechanism for a positioner substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to Figs. 1 to 10,
10 Figs. 1 and 11 to 20, or Fig. 21 of the accompanying drawings.

24. A mechanism for a positioner substantially as shown in Figs. 4 to 10 of the accompanying drawings.

25. A mechanism for a positioner substantially as
15 shown in Figs. 15 to 20 of the accompanying drawings.

26. A positioning mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims having a positioning precision of better than one of: 1 millimetre, 100 microns, 10 microns and one micron.

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Claims:

1. A mechanism for a multi-axis flexure positioner, the mechanism including a fixed part and a movable part, the movable part being connected to the fixed part via a plurality of transmission means, one for each axis, for transmitting actuation forces for the respective axes to the movable part, the transmission means for each axis including a flexure member arranged to transmit actuation forces for that axis to the movable part and to flex between the fixed part and the movable part in response to actuation forces associated with the or each other axis, wherein there are three flexure members arranged to extend along three mutually-perpendicular axes so that each flexure member is flexible along the axes of extent of the other two flexure members, each of the three flexure members comprising a pair of flexure linkages arranged to extend parallel to each other, the three pairs of linkages thus defining three mutually-perpendicular planes.
2. A mechanism according to claim 1, wherein each of the transmission means comprises a plate attached to the fixed part via hinge means.
3. A mechanism according to claim 2, wherein the hinge means defines a hinge axis aligned parallel to, and offset from, the plane defined by the associated pair of linkages, and perpendicular to the axis of extent of the associated pair of linkages, to allow linear movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part.
4. A mechanism according to claim 2, wherein the hinge means defines a hinge axis aligned perpendicular to the plane defined by the associated pair of linkages to allow rotary movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part.
5. A mechanism according to any preceding claim

in combination with one actuator for each hinged plate, the or each actuator being arranged to actuate the plate and thus control movement of the flexure linkages associated with the hinged plate.

5 6. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least one of the transmission means comprises a plate attached to the fixed part via pivot means.

10 7. A mechanism according to claim 6, wherein the pivot means allows the plate to rotate about two mutually perpendicular axes of rotation, a first one of said axes of rotation being parallel to, and offset from, the plane defined by the associated pair of linkages, and perpendicular to the axis of extent of
15 the associated pair of linkages, and the second of said axes of rotation being perpendicular to the first rotational axis and the axis of extent of the associated pair of linkages, to allow both linear and rotary movement of the movable part relative to the
20 fixed part.

 8. A mechanism according to claim 6 or 7 in combination with a pair of actuators for each pivot plate, the or each pair of actuators being arranged to actuate the plate and thus control movement of the
25 flexure linkages associated with the pivot plate so that one of each pair of actuators serves to provide linear movement, and the other of each pair of actuators rotary movement, of the movable part relative to the fixed part.

30 9. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least two of the transmission means provide for rotary movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part about
35 respective axes of rotary movement, the mechanism being dimensioned and arranged so that the axes of rotary movement are mutually perpendicular.

10. A mechanism according to claim 9, the mechanism being dimensioned and arranged so that the at least two axes of rotary movement intersect at a common point.

5 11. A mechanism according to claim 10, wherein the linkages of one of the pairs of linkages are of a different length to the linkages of the other, or another, of the pairs of linkages, the linkages of each pair of linkages being of equal length.

10 12. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least two of the transmission means provide for linear movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part about
15 respective axes of linear motion, the mechanism being dimensioned and arranged so that the axes of linear motion are mutually perpendicular.

13. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein at least one of the transmission means provides for linear movement of the
20 movable part relative to the fixed part about an axis of linear motion and wherein at least one of the transmission means provides for rotary movement of the movable part relative to the fixed part about an axis of rotary motion, the mechanism being dimensioned and
25 arranged so that the axes of linear and rotary motion are one and the same axis.

14. A mechanism for a positioner substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to Figs. 1 to 10 or Figs. 1 and 11 to 20 of the accompanying drawings.

30 15. A mechanism for a positioner substantially as shown in Figs. 4 to 10 of the accompanying drawings.

16. A mechanism for a positioner substantially as shown in Figs. 15 to 20 of the accompanying drawings.

17. A mechanism according to any one of the preceding claims having a positioning precision of
35 better than one of: 1 millimetre, 100 microns, 10 microns and one micron.



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Claims searched: 1-21(first),22

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Patents Act 1977
Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.P): G2J(JRD, JMM, J8C, J8J, JCA, JGED, JGEAR, JGEAX)

Int Cl (Ed.6): G02B

Other:

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
X	GB 2185323 A (VICKERS) Figs 1,3,4,p 2 l 102 on,p 3 l 18 on	22
"	GB 2129955 A (MDL) the Fig	-
"	GB 2067783 A (CARLSON) the Fig,p 2 l 19 on	-
"	GB 1252667 A (IRD) Figs 1,2	1,2,22 at least
"	GB 0639674 A (MONCHABLON) the Fig	22
"	US 4773727 A (CLDTO) Figs 1-5	22

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
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